



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



DOT APPROVES POLICY FOR INSTALLATION OF PURPLE HEART SIGNS

This week the South Dakota Department of Transportation Commission approved new policy for the installation of signs recognizing Purple Heart entities designated by the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Kenneth Teunissen, Commander of the Dakotas Military Order of the Purple Heart, was successful in getting the Commission to adopt new procedures. Moving forward DOT will install the signs provided by the Military Order of the Purple Heart. The signs will be installed by DOT on the existing supports of the boundary signs.



DOT will install up to two Purple Heart signs if only one state highway route enters a community and four signs if there is more than one state highway routed through the community.

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VA RELEASES 2019 NATIONAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION REPORT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released its 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report. It includes findings from its most recent analysis of veteran suicide data from 2005 to 2017. The 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report highlights suicide as a national problem, and urges all Americans to come together to address the larger social issues that contribute to the increased rates of suicide in the U.S.

One key change from this year's report is that it does not group together Veterans eligible for VA services with servicemembers and former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated. This change was necessary because these groups are unique and do not all qualify for the same benefits and services, therefore they require individualized outreach strategies.

Moving forward, the VA's report will include a separate section focusing on never federally activated former Guard and Reserve members, while the Department of Defense will publish a separate report focusing on servicemember suicides.

The most recent data, from 2017, has allowed the VA to better understand and address current trends in veteran suicide, as well as evaluate ongoing suicide prevention programs. Key VA initiatives described in the report reflect the department's efforts to prevent Veteran suicide through targeted strategies that reach all veterans.

The VA's [public-health approach](#) to suicide prevention focuses on equipping communities to help veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it. That approach is the foundation for the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide](#) (PREVENTS) executive order, which aims to bring together stakeholders across all levels of government and in the private sector to work side by side to ensure that our veterans are able to seek and receive the care, support and services they deserve.

"The VA is working to prevent suicide among all veterans, whether they are enrolled in VA health care or not," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why the department has adopted a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention, using bundled strategies that cut across various sectors — faith communities, employers, schools and health care organizations, for example — to reach veterans where they live and thrive."

The VA was one of the first institutions in the United States to implement comprehensive suicide risk surveillance, which involves collecting and interpreting suicide-related data.

"Data is an integral part of our public health approach to suicide prevention," said Wilkie. "The latest data offers insights that will help us build networks of support and research-backed suicide prevention initiatives to reach all veterans, even those who do not and may never come to us for care."

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VA SUICIDE REPORT (CONTINUED)

The report yields several insights pertinent to ongoing suicide prevention efforts:

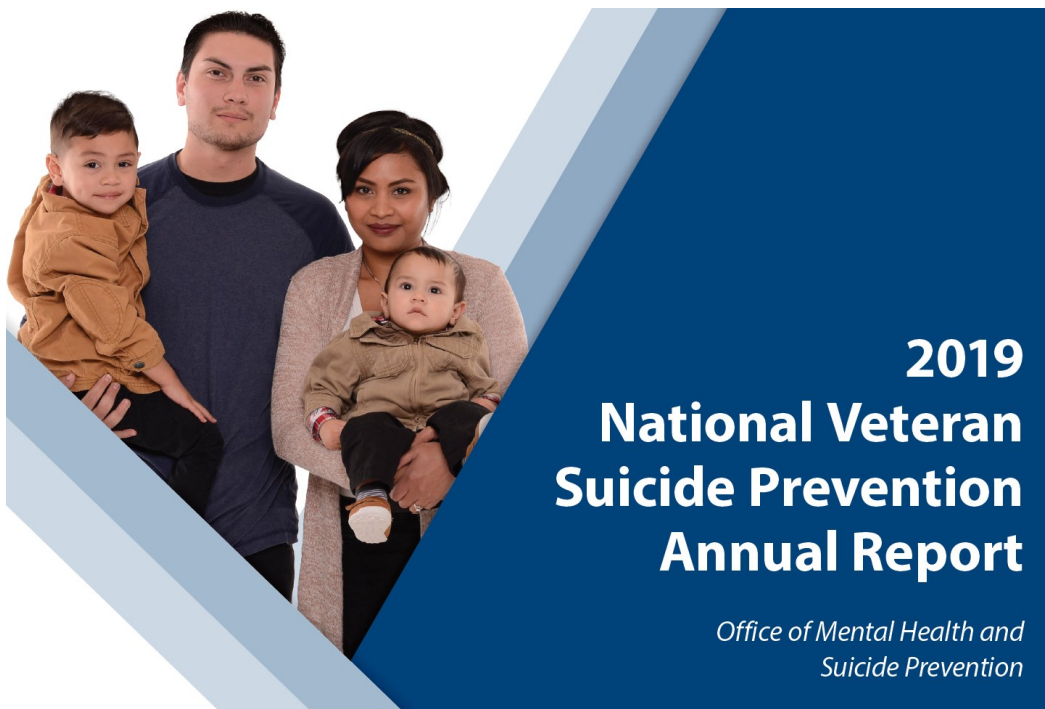
From 2005 to 2017, suicides among all U.S. adults increased by 43.6 percent, while suicides among veterans increased by 6.1 percent.

- America's non-veteran population is increasing while its veteran population is decreasing over time.
- The number of veteran suicides exceeded 6,000 each year from 2008 to 2017.
- In 2017, the suicide rate for veterans was 1.5 times the rate for non-veteran adults, after adjusting for population differences in age and sex.
- Firearms were the method of suicide in 70.7 percent of male veteran suicide deaths and 43.2 percent of female Veteran suicide deaths in 2017.
- In addition to the aforementioned Veteran suicides, there were 919 suicides among never federally activated former National Guard and Reserve members in 2017, an average of 2.5 suicide deaths per day.

Suicide is heartbreaking, and our nation understandably grieves with each one. However, suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play in saving lives. The 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report emphasizes that suicide can be prevented through meaningful connection, one person at a time.

The full report and the accompanying state data sheets are available at https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/Suicide-Prevention-Data.asp.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call **1-800-273-8255** and Press **1**, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.



STANDARD FALLS VA FLU SHOT SCHEDULE

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is posting the following schedule for veterans to get their flu shots. Shots can be obtained in Primary Care 2nd floor conference room. The schedule for 2019 is as follows:

Thursday—September 26 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Friday—October 4 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Wednesday—October 16 from 7:30 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Thursday—October 24 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Tuesday—October 29 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Tuesday—November 5 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Wednesday—November 20 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Monday—December 2 from 8:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Friday—December 13 from 7:30 am—12:00 noon (CT)



STANDARD FALLS STAND DOWN



SDDVA staffers Michelle Henderson, Brett Dickerson and Ryan Sweeter manned a booth at the Sioux Falls Veterans Stand Down last Friday. Staff assisted veterans with both federal and state benefit programs and services.

Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken stopped by the booth to thank the staff for their service.

Today, Stand Down refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's homeless veterans. Homeless veterans are brought together in a single loca-



tion and are provided access to the community resources needed to begin addressing their individual problems and rebuilding their lives.

Hundreds of veterans were provided with a broad range of necessities including food, clothing, medical, legal and mental health assistance, job counseling and referral, and most importantly, companionship and camaraderie.

STATE VETERANS HOME CELEBRATES 130 YEARS

The 130th anniversary celebration of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home started off with a community parade that began in Centennial Park and traveled through Hot Springs to the MJFSVH Campus. Leading the parade was the Mounted Color Guard. Parade consisted of floats, vintage cars and wagons, horses and horse-drawn wagons and the American Legion Riders.

Following the parade, a welcoming ceremony was held on the campus of the new MJFSVH. Re-enactors Tom and Laura Inman played the roles of Civil War General Logan and his wife Mary.



General Logan served as emcee for the welcoming ceremony and introduced guest speakers MJFSVH Superintendent Brad Richardson, South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Greg Whitlock and Lt. Governor Larry Rhoden.

In his remarks, Secretary Whitlock noted, "Missions and visions have changed over the past 130 years, but the one thing that has not



changed is the dedication and commitment of the staff. The staff has a legacy of providing the highest level of care to our heroes."

The State Veterans Home has, and continues to, offer a quality of life which emphasizes privacy, encourages independence, provides comfort and security and meets social needs. Our Home embraces a person-centered approach to caring for our residents.

Secretary Whitlock concluded his remarks by thanking all of the veterans, the staff, the volunteers and all the organizations and associations that partner with us, for 130 great years!

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STATE VETERANS HOME CELEBRATES 130 YEARS (CONTINUED)

Lt. Governor Rhoden and Superintendent Richardson thanked and recognized all veterans and commended the staff for their unending dedication to our heroes.

Rhoden's father-in-law lived his last five years at the Home and even celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary while at the Home.

"Our celebration underscores South Dakota's rich legacy and commitment, over the past 130 years, to take care of our heroes and our allegiance to carry that mission into the next century," said Superintendent Richardson.

Following the welcome addresses, a chuckwagon lunch was served by the local VFW Post.



Tours of the new MJFSVH and the Kearn Building were provided by the Hot Springs Elks Lodge and the Pioneer Museum Board of Directors.

The South Dakota Grand Master of Masons conducted a rededication of the Kearn Building (Building Two). The



plaque they presented will be on display in the building. The cornerstone of the first building was placed on November 11, 1889.

Special guest for the celebration was Medal of Honor Recipient Michael J. Fitzmaurice, his wife Patty and his mom Darlene. The State Veterans Home was named after Fitzmaurice in 1998. Michael received the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity of action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a Specialist Four, United States Army, Troop D, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, 101st Airborne Division at Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, March 23, 1971.



VETERANS ENJOY A DAY IN THE HILLS



The festivities of the 130th celebration at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home may have drawn to a close, but taking care of our heroes is a legacy that our staff provides every day.

Staff took advantage of the great weather this week and boarded some of the residents on the 1880 Train. All Aboard!

Residents got to enjoy a two hour, train ride through the scenic hills and view Black Elk Peak, mining encampments, wildlife, and the fall color changes.

Activities Director Laura Inman ensures our heroes have plenty to do on campus, as well as activities off campus, such as campouts, fishing trips, pon-

toon rides, hayrides, trail rides, trap shooting, hunting trips, shopping excursions, plays, car races, ball-games, movies, theatrical productions, and much more.

Laura works hard to individualize the experience for residents by offering meaningful activities that reflect our heroes preferences.



SD GUARDSMAN ASSIGNED AS ARNG DEPUTY SENIOR BANDMASTER

A South Dakota Army National Guard Soldier is now serving as a bandmaster with the Army National Guard.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Terry Beckler, of Aberdeen, is assigned as the deputy senior bandmaster working in a variety of areas affecting operations and training for Army National Guard bands and musicians across the country.

Beckler began his official duties Sept. 1 and will serve for a minimum of three years in the position. The assignment will also bring a promotion to the rank of chief warrant officer 5 later this year.

"Being selected for the position of deputy senior bandmaster is a huge honor and responsibility," said Beckler, who has over 33 years of service in the SDARNG. "I feel very grateful to have made it this far in my career and have this opportunity."

Beckler is the commander of the SDARNG's 147th Army Band in Mitchell, where he will continue to serve in conjunction with his ARNG duties. On the civilian side, Beckler also serves as the professor of percussion and associate director of bands at Northern State University in Aberdeen.

Beckler was selected for the assignment through a board process at the National Guard Bureau, after submitting an application for this position. Beckler has more than 20 years of experience as a band commander and conductor. In January of 2006, the 147th Army Band was awarded the Howard Citation of Musical Excellence from the John Philip Sousa Foundation.

One of Beckler's new duties includes leading one of the two Operational Readiness Evaluation Teams. The teams visit all 51 Army National Guard bands on a five-year rotation to evaluate the bands' musical support areas - visiting about six to eight bands each year.

Steering Group, which is made up of leaders from all three components of the U.S. Army's active duty, National Guard and Reserve. Beckler says the group works to further initiatives in all areas of band operations and training and meets quarterly at the U.S. Army School of Music at Little Creek Joint Base, Virginia.

Additionally, Beckler will assist with organization and planning the annual ARNG Bands Leader Training, and he will serve as the National Guard liaison for the Army Music Mentorship Program.

Beckler says he is excited to use his years of experience in musical training and performance, and is looking forward to the opportunity to meet Soldiers from almost every state and share good things he has learned visiting other units.



153RD FORWARD SUPPORT COMPANY CHANGES COMMAND

Capt. Lucas Shama, originally of Rapid City, took command of the South Dakota Army National Guard's Forward Support Company of the 153rd Engineer Battalion during a change of command ceremony at the Huron National Guard Armory, Sept. 8.

As commander, Shama is responsible for command and control of more than 80 soldiers in the unit, which provides transportation, maintenance, and field feeding support to the 153rd Engineer Battalion. He assumes command from Capt. Andrew Delgado, who served in the position since January 2018.

Shama said he is excited to be taking command of the unit as it consolidates from Parkston with its detachment and headquarters battalion in Huron.

"I'm honored to receive the consolidated FSC in Huron," said Shama. "It's an exciting time to be with the South Dakota National Guard, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to experience it with the 153rd FSC."

Shama began his service in the SDARNG in 2013 when he commissioned as a second lieutenant through the South Dakota State University ROTC program and assigned as an engineer officer.

He has served in a variety of leadership and staff roles including positions in the 153rd Engineer Battalion, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, and 155th Engineer Company. Shama deployed as a platoon leader with the 155th in 2015 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Shama holds a Bachelor of Science degree in economics from South Dakota State University and a Master in Business Administration degree from the University of South Dakota.

Shama lives in Omaha with his wife, Meredith, and their two-year-old son, Russell.



CHANGES TO VA CAREGIVER PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced actions to strengthen the Caregiver Support Program and establish a timeline for expanding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) in accordance with section 161 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 ([MISSION Act](#)).

Under the MISSION Act, the VA will expand the PCAFC to eligible veterans from all eras using a phased approach. Currently, the program is only available to eligible veterans seriously injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001. Prior to expanding, the VA must upgrade its information technology (IT) system and implement other improvements to strengthen the program.

“Caregivers play a critical role in the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Under the MISSION Act, we are strengthening and expanding our program to positively impact the lives of veterans and deliver the best customer experience to them and their caregivers.”

In December 2018, the VA suspended certain discharges from the program due to ongoing concerns about inconsistent application of eligibility requirements at VA medical centers. Since then, the VA has held listening sessions with caregivers and other stakeholders, developed or amended 14 standard operating procedures to clarify program requirements for VA staff, increased oversight in each Veterans Integrated Service Network, provided training and education to staff and caregivers and is boosting operational capacity with the hiring of more than 680 staff.

To modernize its caregiver IT system, the VA is adopting a three-phased approach and will deploy a new system based on a commercial off the shelf product called Caregiver Record Management Application (CARMA) beginning in October 2019. The VA will deploy phase two in January 2020 to centralize and automate stipend payment calculations and expects to deploy phase three in the summer of 2020, which will enable caregivers to apply for benefits online. The VA will then perform testing and verify that the system has full functionality before expanding the program as required under the MISSION Act.

The expansion will occur in two phases, beginning in the summer of 2020 or once the Secretary has certified that the new IT system is fully implemented. In the first phase, PCAFC will be expanded to eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. The final phase of the expansion will begin two years later. It will expand PCAFC to eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty after May 7, 1975, through September 10, 2001.

Additionally, the VA has gathered input and is developing regulatory changes to streamline the program and provide more clarity for veterans and their family caregivers. The VA will publish a proposed rule for public comment prior to issuing final regulations.



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CHANGES TO VA CAREGIVER PROGRAM (CONTINUED)

The VA is also working across the department to ensure caregivers have a positive experience through program improvements and initiatives to include:

- Providing home and community-based care alternatives through the Choose Home Initiative at 21 VA medical centers.
- Establishing the Center for Excellence for Veteran and Caregiver Research named after Senator Elizabeth Dole.
- Expanding telehealth services to enable veterans and their caregivers to get care in the comfort of their homes.
- Delivering valuable programs for caregivers such as peer support mentoring, a Caregiver Support Line, self-care courses and educational programs to help caregivers succeed.

Caregivers play a critical role in enabling veterans to maintain their highest level of independence and remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. The VA leads the nation in providing unprecedented benefits and services to caregivers. The MISSION Act strengthens the VA's ability to serve as a trusted partner in the care of our nation's most vulnerable veterans.

To learn more about the many support services available for caregivers of veterans, visit www.caregiver.va.gov or call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274.



Taking Care of You: Powerful Tools for Caregivers

A woman with short brown hair, looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Caring for a Veteran?
Call VA's Caregiver Support Line for help toll-free:

1-855-260-3274
Monday - Friday 8:00 am - 11:00 pm ET
Saturday 10:00 am - 6:00 pm ET

VA Caregiver Support
PROGRAM

Department of Veterans Affairs

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sep 28—Health Connect Fair—Sioux Falls Arena—11:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 10—Take Back the Night—Multicultural Center—Sioux Falls (515 N. Main Avenue) 5:30 pm—7:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 12—Mission VI Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—9:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 14—State Offices Closed
 Oct 18—Expo for Her—Sioux Falls Arena—2:00—9:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 17—Trail Ridge Health and Wellness Fair—12:00—4:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 2—Second Annual Hangar Dance (Midwest Honor Flight Benefit)—Mid America Museum of Aviation—
 Sioux City, IA—7:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 2—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game— Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)
 Nov 5—Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair—Rapid City Rushmore Plaza Civic Center—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
 Dec 3—Governor Noem’s Budget Address
 Dec 9—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial at Capitol Lake in
 Pierre—11:00 am (CT)

2020

Jan 14—State of the State Address
 Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception
 Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
 Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown
 May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings
 Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron



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